

## Inflammatory Breast Cancer

Inflammatory breast cancer is an uncommon type of breast cancer in which cancer cells block the lymph vessels in the skin of the breast. This blockage causes the breast to become red, swollen, and warm. The skin of the breast may have ridges or appear pitted, like the skin of an orange (called *peau d'orange*). This type of breast cancer may also cause a discharge from the nipple, and the nipple may be pulled back. Another possible sign of inflammatory breast cancer is the presence of swollen lymph nodes under the arm or above the collarbone. Often, a tumor cannot be felt, even though one may appear on a mammogram. A biopsy is done to confirm the diagnosis of inflammatory breast cancer.

Inflammatory breast cancer generally grows rapidly, and the cancer cells often spread to other parts of the body. Treatment for inflammatory breast cancer usually involves local treatment to remove or destroy the cancer in the breast and systemic treatment to stop the disease from spreading to other parts of the body. Local treatment affects only cells in the tumor and the area close to it; systemic treatment affects cells throughout the body. The local treatment may be surgery and/or radiation therapy to the breast and underarm. The systemic treatment may be chemotherapy (anticancer drugs), hormonal therapy (drugs that interfere with the effects of the female hormone estrogen), or both. Systemic treatment is generally given before the surgery and/or radiation therapy.

Researchers are studying the effectiveness of high-dose chemotherapy with bone marrow or peripheral blood stem cell transplantation (replacing blood-forming cells destroyed by treatment) in improving the outcome of patients with inflammatory breast cancer. They are also studying biological therapy (stimulating the immune system to fight the cancer), new chemotherapy and hormonal drugs, and new combinations of chemotherapy and hormonal drugs. Information about ongoing clinical trials (research studies) is available from the Cancer Information Service (see below), or from the National Cancer Institute's cancerTrials™ Web site at <http://cancertrials.nci.nih.gov> on the Internet.

# # #

### **Sources of National Cancer Institute Information**

#### **Cancer Information Service**

Toll-free: 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

TTY (for deaf and hard of hearing callers): 1-800-332-8615

#### **NCI Online**

##### ***Internet***

Use <http://www.cancer.gov> to reach NCI's Web site.

##### ***CancerMail Service***

To obtain a contents list, send e-mail to [cancermail@icicc.nci.nih.gov](mailto:cancermail@icicc.nci.nih.gov) with the word "help" in the body of the message.

#### **CancerFax® fax on demand service**

Dial 301-402-5874 and listen to recorded instructions.

**This fact sheet was reviewed on 1/20/99**